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Prologue: viewing and reviewing 'Planet Shakespeare' (Craiova, 23 April-6 May 2018)

While the International Shakespeare Festival started in Craiova, Romania, in 1994 as a triennial occurrence, acquired Bucharest as its twin venue in 1995, government patronage in 2003 and moved to its biennial schedule in 2006, the Shakespeare in Performance Seminar – an initiative of the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) within the Festival – is, comparatively, a new venture dating back to 2010. The vital link between ESRA and the Festival was established by Nicoleta Cinpoes, on the occasion of a special edition of the Festival: the only edition dedicated exclusively to a single Shakespeare play, *Hamlet*, and the launch of the New Shakespeare Complete series in Romanian translation. A mark of this initiative's success is that it has been running for almost ten years. At the following editions, the seminar went from strength to strength: the *Hamlet Worldwide* and the launch of the first two volumes of the New Shakespeare Complete in 2010 were followed by the first opendoors event *Shakespeare and Performing Spaces* in 2012, very popular with the European Theatre Critics' Association; by the two-day conference *Everyman's Shakespeare* in 2014; and by the three-day conference *European Directors of Shakespeare*, which gave the floor to twenty-eight speakers in 2016. The topic, scope, participation and format of the seminar were tested in 2018: *Viewing & Reviewing* was a two-week marathon which brought together forty-one participants (from top world scholars to post-graduate Shakespeare aficionados) from a dozen countries collectively to brainstorm pre-show and view, anatomise and review as many shows in the Festival as possible – at once making real every Shakespeare in performance scholar's dream and living the logistical nightmare of mapping and matching interests, availability, linguistic expertise and sheer physical resilience to eighteen-hour working days.

What follows is the fruit of collective labour: twenty productions in eighteen reviews, presented here in the order of performance, and two critical essays on viewing and reviewing, by Sir Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson, respectively.¹ In a discussion of Peter Hall and John Barton's productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Wells' article retraces the emergence of academic reviewing as scholars increasingly took interest in the world of the theatre. This rapprochement of what Edmondson terms the Academy and the Theatre gained impulsion after Allardyce Nicoll founded the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1951. Questioning the divide between non-academic and academic reviewing, Edmondson argues that the time may have come for Shakespeareans to move out of the territory of academic journals into the world of more reactive media, including blogs. As recalled by Wells, attention to productions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, is one of the hallmarks of *Cahiers E'lisabe'thains*, with extensive review sections and two special issues dedicated to reviewing, one of which grew out of a seminar at the World Shakespeare Congress in Prague in 2011, co-chaired by Paul Prescott, Peter J. Smith and the journal's reviews editor, Janice Valls-Russell.² At ESRA's 2017 Conference in Gdan'sk, a panel led by Valls-Russell, to which Cinpoes, contributed, explored the challenges of reviewing Shakespeare in mainland Europe, where plays are often seen in translation and where Shakespeare reviewing voices are silent in a number of countries, for lack of opportunities, which may include a dearth of productions and the absence of media coverage or, indeed, of a reviewing tradition.

So it seemed evident that Cahiers should open the pages of this, its 100th, issue to Craiova's Planet Shakespeare – 2018, all the more so since the format chosen to cover the Festival – collective reviewing – is something that the journal has been experimenting with in recent issues, with contributions from mixed groups of academic and amateur or student reviewers.³ While collective reviewing may be yet another alternative when, to quote Edmondson, 'the critics get it wrong', the Craiova experience showed that this may also achieve other, important goals, such as offering multiple perspectives on productions which cannot be viewed several times yet invite complex layers of responses – local, global, linguistic, cultural, political, aesthetic – that cannot be covered by a single reviewer; providing insights into the responses of the Festival's audiences, who bring with them a plurality of spectating experiences; and enabling Shakespeare academics to share a reviewing experience that remains rare in some of the countries they work in.

The participants' comings and goings, and schedule clashes made it physically impossible to prep, attend, discuss and review all thirty-one events, and as such, the Seminar prioritised theatre productions over student-workshopped Shakespeare and concerts. Once the schedule of productions became available, participants volunteered to co-lead all related activities on individual productions; as a result, while each review is signed by the production panel leads, it acknowledges the collective nature and input of all participants. As the two choreographers of this enterprise, we tried to ensure that the whole two weeks of the Festival were covered, that each production had at least two review leads, that the participants who were going to see the productions occupied different positions in the audience and that, wherever possible, one participant spoke the language of the production. (This ultimately proved impossible for the Japanese and Korean productions, and not for the lack of trying; for the Korean production, this was somewhat rescued by the post-show discussions with the cast members.)

A first of this Festival's edition was its agenda to bring Shakespeare out of the more usual indoor venues. 'Planet Shakespeare' was mapped onto the whole city, with productions taking place in the Amza Pellea main auditorium of the Marin Sorescu National Theatre as well as its black box studio I. D. Sîrbu venue, the Colibri Theatre for Children and Young Adults, the pocket theatre of the Faculty of Agronomy, the Students' Culture House, a cultural music club, Craiova's squares, parks and carparks. The Festival also proposed events in Bucharest, as in previous editions, and in 2018 Shakespeare also made it to the Danube, to Fortress Harbour (Port Cetate) on the natural border with Bulgaria, which customarily hosts the Festival's musical and/or outdoor events. Temporary theatre spaces were erected on public squares. A promenade performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* started in the carpark of the University of Craiova and led spectators through the university hall into a park, a residential area and down shopping streets. A few problems were manifest in the open-air venue of Romanescu Park, especially during the first production, *Much Ado About Nothing*, where actors and the technical team – of this indoor-designed production – had some difficulties adjusting to outdoor conditions: voices project differently in the cooling evening and ill-adjusted lighting effects can create insufficiently focused visual effects. Both actors and spectators had to recalibrate their experience to the sheer facts of open-air theatre: detailed sets, subtle mimicry and voices don't travel past the front row, and broader gestures and amplified voices which may appear parodic to inveterate indoor Shakespeare audiences are part-and-parcel of open-air practice, an altogether different Shakespeare. By the second production, however, such technical teething problems and mismanaged expectations were solved. While some events were hard to get into, owing to the size of some venues (where seating was limited to 100–200), others were endlessly capacious and, importantly, free of

charge. This was truly an open Festival, embracing a large community, including first-time theatregoers.

It was encouraging to see that the Festival continues to promote new translations in the Shakespeare Complete Series coordinated by George Volceanov, not only in the customary launch of the volumes released since the previous edition. The visibility and impact of the Series has increased since 2010, so much so that it is now intrinsic to the Festival and at the forefront of changes of practice: the new versions provide surtitles for non-Romanian productions, and by being versatile in capturing contemporary nuances, they provide spectators with an experience more attuned to productions whose ethos is the here-and-now. The Series also supplies the playscripts for the National Theatre of Craiova productions that are customarily commissioned for each edition of the Festival. In 2016, the commissioned play was *Julius Caesar*, directed by Peter Schneider. In 2018, Volceanov's translation of *Timon of Athens* premiered in Charles Chemin's *Athens by Night* production, in a double bill with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was performed in an older, poetic translation – thereby enabling audiences to journey through two very different renderings of Shakespeare in Romanian. The academic introductions to the translations – authored by Romanian Shakespeare specialists who have supported the ESRA seminar since its inception or were co-opted to the new translations project at one of its previous edition – also provided valuable input for the seminar.

Productions varied not only in language but in theatrical tongues, offering a range of experiences for all tastes, ages and levels of engagement with Shakespeare: from a sixty-minute puppet *Dream* in a pocket theatre to the five-hour theatrical orgy of *The African Tales*; from a three-actor *Hamlet*, performed in a circle just over two metres in diameter, to the itinerant community *Dream* whose eighty or so performers accrued audiences as they moved from location to location; from a claustrophobic *Macbeth* in a black box studio to an oppressive *Macbeth* situated in the witching time of night on a narrow traverse stage erected in a public square; from a one-man *Henry V* to the fifty-odd cast of a colourful *Romeo and Juliet*; from an apocalyptic *Tempest*, ending not with a *Brave New World* but with the death of our planet and humanity as we know them, to a magical, youthful *Tempe^{te}!* that tickled all senses in the natural setting of Craiova's Romanescu Park; from the traditional period performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*, with a touch of Gilbert and Sullivan, to the conspiracy-theory *Second Best Bed*; from the French chansons of a bittersweet English *Twelfth Night* to the operatic hopelessness of a Romanian-Armenian *Othello*; and, within a single, double-bill evening, a journey through *Athens by Night*, from *Timon of Athens'* goldclad Athens, gradually stripped of assets and humanity, to the barren, lunar woods outside the city in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where, however, a game of silver balloons between actors and spectators provided a light, festive touch that reconnected with the theme of the Festival.

Tragedies, comedies and tragicomedies were on offer by public-funded and independent companies alongside student productions and community ventures, which came together in Craiova from all five continents to offer a planetary range of experimental approaches and new adventures. Last but not least, this collection of essays and reviews is our token of gratitude to the Festival and its organisers. They responded enthusiastically to this viewing-andreviewing project from its inception and generously enabled our access and participation, kindly hosted us through the Festival and enhanced the visibility of our event, from interviews and features on national and local TV, radio and social media, to good old paper signs to the venue for our daily sessions. Our other partner in crime was the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Craiova: they generously lent us the

conference room for every session of the two-week Viewing & Reviewing marathon, their translation skills for events open to the public, their local knowledge and precious time. Having been welcomed so generously on Planet Shakespeare – 2018, we in turn are sending it out into the world!

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1. This special section, Viewing and reviewing 'Planet Shakespeare' (Craiova, 23 April–6 May 2018), edited by Nicoleta Cinpoes, and Janice Valls-Russell, includes: this prologue; 'Viewing and reviewing Shakespeare: John Barton and Peter Hall', by Sir Stanley Wells; 'When the critics get it wrong', by Paul Edmondson; 'Play reviews: Craiova International Shakespeare Festival, 23 April–6 May 2018'. It appears in *Cahiers Elisabethains* 100 (November 2019).

2. Peter J. Smith and Janice Valls-Russell with Kath Bradley (eds), *The Royal Shakespeare Company Complete Works Festival 2006–2007*, *Cahiers Elisabethains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 71(1 Suppl.), 2007. Paul Prescott, Peter J. Smith and Janice Valls-Russell (eds), "'Nothing if not critical": International Perspectives on Shakespearean Theatre Reviewing', *Cahiers Elisabethains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 81(1 Suppl.), 2012, pp. 1–8.

3. See, for instance, Groupe Miroir, 'Shakespeare at the Avignon Festival in 2015', *Cahiers Elisabethains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 90(1), 2016, pp. 171–5.

Author biographies

Nicoleta Cinpoes, is Professor of Shakespeare Studies at the University of Worcester, UK. She is the author of *Shakespeare's Hamlet in Romania* (Mellen, 2010) and editor of *Doing Kyd* (MUP, 2016) and contributes regularly articles to *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *SEDERI*, *Cahiers Elisabethains*, *New Theatre Quarterly* and specialist collections. She is currently working on the introduction to the new translation of *Titus Andronicus* in Romanian and on the volume *Shakespeare on European Festival Stages* (co-edited with Florence March and Paul Prescott).

Janice Valls-Russell is Reviews Editor of *Cahiers Elisabethains* and a Principal Research Associate employed by France's National Centre for Scientific Research. A member of the Montpellier's Institute for Research on the Renaissance, the Neo-classical Age and the Enlightenment (IRCL), she has co-edited two issues of *Cahiers Elisabethains*, on the RSC 2006–2007 Complete Works Festival (2008) and on international perspectives on reviewing Shakespeare (2012). She is currently co-editing a volume on *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* (with Boika Sokolova).